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From: Reynolds, Thomas
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Subject: Sununu oped - The EPA is a mess that needs cleaning up

This ran in the Boston Globe yesterday. Wanted to be sure you saw it.

The EPA is a mess that needs cleaning up

By John E. Sununu August 17, 2015

In George Orwell's dystopian novel "1984," the authoritarian government uses institutionalized propaganda to assure citizens of the benevolence with which it pursues questionable objectives. Thus, the Ministry of Peace oversees endless militarization and war with global powers, while the Ministry of Plenty strictly rations the distribution of food and medicine. These dark ironies gave rise to the notion of "Orwellian" society and made the author a household name. Sixty-five years later, reality has caught up with fiction as America's federal agencies work to undermine the very purpose for which they were designed.

In Southwest Colorado this month, the Environmental Protection Agency caused a massive spill of toxic sludge into Rocky Mountain rivers and streams. Last year, the Veterans Administration was found to be systematically manipulating data, denying thousand of veterans health care access. Last week it was revealed that a technology glitch denied coverage to another 35,000 combat veterans. As engineers like to observe, one point makes for data, two makes a trend.

When government agencies undertake activity that results in consequences that are the opposite of their stated mission, something has gone awry. Apologists for the Obama administration are quick to dismiss these catastrophes as isolated incidents beyond the control of Cabinet leadership. In fact, they are the direct result of government grown too big, too cumbersome, and too arrogant to operate effectively.

In Colorado, the EPA literally went looking for work. Digging into an abandoned mine (there are literally thousands across the Rockies), workers breached a containment area, spilling three million gallons of tainted sludge into the Animas and St. Juan river systems. As local leaders scrambled to assess damage, a plume of lead, arsenic, and other heavy metals flowed through New Mexico and Utah straight toward the Lake Powell reservoir.

This was no accident, just as the systemic failure at the Veterans Administration was no accident. They are the inevitable result of leadership that puts faith in bureaucracy, and bureaucracy that

believes that good intentions and lots of regulations make common sense and efficiency unnecessary.

When businesses go down the wrong path — when they hire the wrong leaders, design the wrong product, or create a cost structure that is too high — they go out of business. But when government agencies do the same thing, there are rarely repercussions. The bureaucracies grow larger, leaders hire underlings who happily carry out every ill conceived decision, and the money continues to flow.

Following the mine disaster, the bureaucratic arrogance was palpable. For 24 hours, the EPA failed to notify local officials, who only learned of the spill when the river began to turn a disturbing mustard yellow. Then the EPA lied about the spill rate, claiming the flow was only a fraction of the actual 750-gallon-per-minute toxic deluge. Even states' attorneys general were kept in the dark.

This cold indifference to those they serve reflects the command-and-control mentality of the Obama administration and conveys a deep distrust of business, markets, and capitalism. Ignoring this systemic failure, and consumed by a sense of self-righteousness, Obama's bureaucrats reach ever deeper into the economy, pursuing expensive and unnecessary regulation of the internet, carbon emissions, and even car loans — the latter comes despite an explicit prohibition of proposed rules written into the law.

At EPA as elsewhere, arrogant leadership and incompetent bureaucracy are a dangerous combination. Today, America's coal plants have never been cleaner, our nuclear plants have never been safer, and the evolution of fracking (a 40-year-old technology) has driven down energy costs to their lowest levels in decades. Blind to this reality, and searching for reasons to push for more funding, the EPA went looking for trouble and found it. It will take new leadership — and a long time — to clean up the mess they've left behind.

John E. Sununu, a former Republican senator from New Hampshire, writes regularly for the Globe.

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